Speeches of Robert M. La Follette

Speech
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other cause but that of Women's Suffrage. And so we came to a mutual understanding and We decided that the greatest issue of the day was the New Woman.

You'd do me the greatest kindness of a favor if you'd tell them that I had her almost ready for presentation to the society this evening. But an incident occurred which changed the whole current of my thoughts.

It was downtown in one of our large furniture stores. The massive front door was gently open and a small lad of about 12 years, with dark complexion, and bright but rather dusty face, with unmistakable Eastem features, carrying an arm's length basket, timidly approached the proprietor with a genuine business air, offered his matches for sale cheap. He attracted the attention of everyone within hearing and the merchant, whose pleased with the good relationships of the little fellow, then by the quality of his wares immediately bought 25 cents worth.

I followed the lad, asked how his name & address is why he did not go to school. He explained the necessity of his having to help support the family. His father was sick, a widow 14 years old. He had never prior been doing the housework and taking care of the children, while his mother was occupied all day, tending a fruit stand.
Having had my attention drawn to numerous similar facts, my mind became so absorbed in them, that all other thoughts sank into oblivion, & I resolved there & there, that I would submit to you, the sufferings and happiness of these Little Russian Refugees.

Knowing that there education and enlightenment is to be, the most vital the future issue of the Day.

We must be careful lest history again repeats itself and the outcome of all these religious wars, again culminate in the persecution of Jews.

Just because we are Jews, our lives and actions must be above reproach. We must be more humble, more straightforward than any other nationality.

We must try and uplift our downtrodden and unfortunate brethren, not alone for their own sake but for that of humanity, but for the protection and reputation of our own nationality. Their misdeeds reflect directly on us and every one of us individually ought to do all in his power, to help lay the foundation of good citizenship in them.

What wonderful strength of character, have these people displayed, when in spite of the hardships heaped upon them, in spite of the oppressions—many of them have surmounted all obstacles and come along nicely.

The wonderful transition which often takes place in a comparatively short time is enough to assure the administration and wonder of the whole enlightened world, of the creating power and hatred in such narrow minds. The brutal relics of the Middle Ages are now trying to resurrect, floundering against the whole world.
Tradition has painted us as frivolous for our skill in money making. I consider this as mere distinction. What can affect to little money. Money is power, is necessary for the advancement of civilization and science. I do not doubt that through energy & industry all of those bright little Russians, who have sought refuge in our midst, will in time be well-to-do.

What I feel most is this ignorance! If we allow things to go on as they are their education will not keep pace with their morally advancement. And here is where the mischief lies. Is it just, that the opportunities are not there.

Why are Russians at heart, not to help them out of this difficulty? Can we open up an evening school where the knowledge of this education can be made, the highest language taught?

A school of this description was conducted here several years ago, with superb results; why did we allow that to discontinue?

Let us arise ourselves to meet the seriousness of the situation, to the necessity of immediate action.

Let us all join hands and promise that we will encourage & help this and all other movements towards this educational advancement, and you can well assure, we will earn the respect of the community. It will more than repay for our time & trouble.

The little Russian Refuge.